Claimed by R. L. Dabney in his manuscript "List of my Published Writings". Dated 1873

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PRESBYTERIANISM,

WITH THE MODERN IMPROVEMENTS.

AS ILLUSTRATED

BY THE SAYINGS AND DOINGS OF THE

BROAD CHURCH GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

RECENTLY CONVENED IN

BALTIMORE, MD.

THIS *Omnibus* Convocation of the "Reunited Presbyterian Church" has come and gone, with its crowds and dust, and we purpose to take some note of its complexion. Comparing it with venerable predecessors, we are certainly made to see that "the world moves." The first act of a Presbyterian General Assembly is to choose its "Moderator" or President, and it is always understood that the choice falls upon a "representative man," and is an eminent compliment to him. The old Assemblies were careful to confer this honor upon such standards of orthodoxy as their Rev. John Rodgers, D. D., and their Ashbel Greens, McDowells, Breckinridges, Plumers, McFarlands and Thornwells. The "representative man" of the Baltimore Assembly was Dr. Howard Crosby, "Chancellor of the University of New York," a recent acquisition of the reunion, whose chief theological distinction is the publication of a heretical work upon the constitution of the Redeemer's person (which is, of course, as a doctrine, the corner stone of theology). This work was so erroneous that the *Princeton Review*, the famous "iron-clad" of the Calvinistic fleet, felt constrained

to attack, cannonade, pierce, and, in short, blow up generally Dr. Howard Crosby with its rifled shells. The Unitarians, on the other hand, welcomed his work with much glee, as a sort of half way house between orthodoxy and them. Dr. Crosby there tells us that while Christ is in fact God-man, and really has a divine nature as truly as a human, yet while on earth he had not, and could not have any consciousness or energy of that divinity in Him. He asserts that this divinity was in Him "dormant," and speaks with tedious repetition of "the *dormancy or quiescence* of his divine nature." "There is not, and ought not to be *a vestige of deity* in his conscious life till after the resurrection." "*No action of our Saviour's earthly life, from Bethlehem to Calvary, exhibits divinity.*" But the Confession of Faith, which Dr. Crosby swore to uphold, says (Chap. VIII) that in the Redeemer "two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, *without conversion, composition or confusion—which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.*" And a little farther on, as though expressly to forestall Dr. Crosby to the very letter of his heresy, "Christ, in the work of mediation, *acteth according to* BOTH NATURES," etc.

How can the Broad Church Assembly more distinctly advertise us that henceforth her Confession of Faith (sworn to by every minister and elder) is of no binding force, and that all her protestations, avowals and subscriptions of it are only to be taken "in a Pickwickian sense?" Why was Dr. Crosby honored thus for the contradiction of his own creed? Because he had belonged to the "other branch," and because he has a stentorian voice! Dr. Hodge's prophetic warning was in vain: "If the truth is lost all is lost."

Another feature of this reverend assemblage's proceedings was their evident *penchant* for excursions and jollifications. We hear of a day consumed in an Assembly excursion to Annapolis, to pay court to (or be courted by) the Governor of Maryland, and of another day spent in an excursion to Washington, to wait on the President of the United States, by special appointment. We can scarcely avoid the conclusion that these journeys must have had the inevitable features of the "editorial" and other "railroad excursions" of the day, and the visions thus raised to the minds of us, the unprivileged laity, present rather queer combinations of orthodoxy and fried oysters, charity (on which virtue the Assembly came out very strong) and champagne, loyalty and lobster salad, Broad Churchism and boned turkey, piety and politics; while those ecclesiastical fuglemen, George Stewart and William E. Dodge, of smuggling notoriety, with Moderators Niccols and Crosby, caper through our imaginations, mounted on livery stable hacks, in all the tinsel and self-importance of marshals on inauguration day. It is encouraging to think how rapidly this great "National" Synod of Presbyterianism is rising toward the dignity and glory of your mediæval Ecumenical Synods of Popery, when the admiring ecclesiastical historians had to exhaust their rhetoric to describe the hundreds of venison, the tons of fat capons and turbot, the hogsheads of wine, and armies of cooks and butlers which were necessary to aid the devout deliberations of the holy fathers. What funny successors to Peter and Paul, Calvin and Knox, Rutherford and Cameron.

It is exceedingly obvious that our Presbyterian fathers cherish a very vivid conviction that *their* "kingdom *is* of this world," when they feel so strong a vocation to pay court to its princes and great men. Gratitude is a very commendable virtue as well as forecast, and the reverend gentlemen could, and doubtless did exercise both, as they made their *salaams*, in remembering the many fat, secular, carnal moneys, and lands, and houses which State and

Federal Courts have enabled them to grasp, and in anticipating similar amiable favors from "Cæsar" in any possible future complication.

One little "drawback" marred the glory of the Washington excursion. Ulysses, the man "whose heart is a deep well," did not bide his time to face the reverend battalion. When it arrived only the Cabinet was there to receive it, and the secular reporters (irreverent dogs!) betray the fact that the President selected the hour *to go a fishing!* Ulysses the Prudent is a silent man. He doubtless considered the society of the mud cats and mullets of the Potomac "flats" more congenial than this cohort of speech making and speech exacting fuglemen, moderators and parsons; for the fishes are like himself—they don't talk! For our part we sympathize hugely with the President. Our opinion of his sagacity rises. This must stand among the wisest acts, in our eyes, which illustrate his two (or four or six) administrations. Were not Mr. Grant so notoriously amiable, the public would be constrained to construe his act—considering previous notice, actors, his errand, etc.—as a decidedly pungent specimen of what the *vulgus* call "a *s-n-u-b!*"

But more important and characteristic proceedings of this Assembly may be found by returning to their first day's deliberations. Before any of the proper business of the Church was considered the "heart of the day" was devoted, with immense enthusiasm, to hearing and discussing a report of a committee, fixing the share the future Assembly of 1876 is to take in the big Centenary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence which Congress has projected in Philadelphia. After much zealous discussion it was resolved, by an immense majority, that the Church should be there in full force, with procession, speechifyings (flags, of course), and an exhibition of her books. Some old fogy urged that this haste in resolving to meddle with a purely secular affair was at least unseemly, because there

would be plenty of time after the Church's proper interests were cared for, and two more Assemblies are to come before the "great day for which all other days were made." But it was vain. The zest of the Assembly in the business of "politicating" was too keen and delightful to be thus baulked.

But to understand the full significance of this matter it must be coupled with the exceedingly gracious overtures made by the Baltimore Assembly to the Presbyterians of the South. The intelligent reader will recall the causes of separation, which, since 1861, have sundered the latter from the radical Presbyterians. When the war of secession was at hand (forced on the South in large part by the previous efforts of politicating parsons) Christian citizens, in the seceded States especially, found themselves face to face with this secular question of civic duty: "My State now claims my exclusive allegiance; the Federal Government also puts in a rival claim; which is the primary allegiance, and to which claimant is my allegiance due?" The question is one purely secular or political. From the days of Andrew Jackson, at least, sincere men had decided it both ways. Before his days most well informed statesmen, with all the framers of the Constitution, had decided for the prior claim of the State. Political parties, Presidents, Legislatures, law officers of the Government, Judges of the Federal Courts, even the Supreme Court had decided in the same way, and nobody had dreamed of impugning their moral purity therefor. The Presbyterian Church had declared, for a century, in its Constitution, that none can bind the conscience of a Church member except Christ, and his prophets and apostles. The man who pretended to find anything in the Scriptures bearing on this question of competing allegiances in a Government of distributed and limited powers, like that of the United States' Constitution, would have been deemed by all an idiot or a lunatic.

Nevertheless, when the war approached, and Southern Presbyterians began, in the exercise of their rights of private judgment, to decide this civic obligation in the way Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Madison, Chief Justice Chase, and the Hartford Convention, and the State of Massachusetts, etc., etc., had done, there was a sudden change. The Presbyterian Assembly of 1861, under the domination of a Radical majority, affected to think that exercise of Christian liberty identical with the "sin of rebellion," condemned by the apostles Paul and Peter. Of course they knew better, but they designed to usurp the spiritual authority of the Church of Christ, and wield it in support of the sectional faction to which they belonged personally. All Southern Presbyterians were, of course, perspicacious enough to see the enormity and wickedness of this Popish usurpation, and, with great forbearance and dignity, they quietly withdrew from the usurping jurisdiction, and formed their own separate denomination. The result was, on the part of successive Radical Assemblies, a series of anathemas and excommunications—from 1861 to 1866—which, of course, fixed this separation, so unavoidable and just on the part of the Southern men, as irrevocable.

But now the greater part of the *Omnibus* Assembly, for very contradictory reasons, want these "cursed children" of the South back. And so they are trying to lure them back, without retracting any of their usurpations, with the proposal that the former curses shall not stand for precedents, and that the Southerners shall be accounted marvellously proper children. The calculation is that, as the Assembly of 1861 usurped without "precedent," a future Assembly can do so again upon occasion. The Assembly is much like Rebekah's womb—it may be prophesied of her: "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people" (the New School Radicals) "shall be stronger than

the other" (the Old School Conservatives); "and the elder" (Drs. Boardman, Hodge and Backus) "shall serve the younger" (Drs. Crosby, Hatfield, &c.) Yet both wish to absorb the "rebels." The Radical majority wish to absorb them in order to extinguish them, inasmuch as Ulysses the Silent, when armed with their battle benison, did not quite do it with the bayonet, and the Federal Courts cannot be relied on to give the Radical Church *all* the Southern religious houses and moneys. That is the motive on one side. On the other side, Esau, the poor, disinherited senior in the happy family, having sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, is sorely in need of help to sustain the cause of Conservative orthodoxy, and prevent its being borne clean to the wall. Knowing the Southerners to be staunch to the back bone, Messrs. Hodge, Boardman and Van Dyke, the leaders of the "forlorn hope," would like to get them in as recruits. But the Southerners must needs be worse "gudgeons" than Ulysses' preferred companions, the mud mullets of the Potomac, to fall into the trap. In the first place, they can hardly fail to note that the Radical majority is not a bit afraid for them to enter the arena—which shows that *they know* the victory is already theirs. Second: These Southern men (fellows who have a good deal of that hard, unsophisticated, old fashioned sense which is so ungullible) have been watching the struggle in the happy family for eleven years, and have perceived that there is no likelihood of victory under temporizing leaders. And third: They cannot but reflect that the very motive of the Conservative desire for their company is a confession of a strife raging in the "Reunited," and they cannot but apply to the case that maxim of Solomon: "He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears."

Now the lure which the Radicals permitted the Baltimore Assembly to hold out to the skittish Southern birds

was after this fashion. None of the anathemas are repealed, but they are not "to stand as precedents." (It has been discovered that usurpers can do without,) As the South deemed that these usurpations were flagrant violations of the law of the Constitution (Chap. XXXI, § 4), "Synods and Councils are to handle and conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical," etc., the Baltimore Assembly assures them that it admires that article, and regards it as very pretty reading indeed. And then there is any amount of "esteem and confidence," etc. It is in the face of this overture that the Assembly has spent two or three of its best days in "handling and concluding" the very unecclesiastical affair of a political jollification, in 1876, over the birth of "The Flag" and the Yankee "Nation," etc., etc. Those hard-headed Southerners will be very apt to conclude that promises not to go politicating, made by Northern Presbyterians, are about as likely to be kept as a promise of oxen not to eat grass, or of wolves to forswear mutton, or of birds not to fly, or of Ulysses' friends, the fishes, not to swim in water. One cannot go, by the wind power of promises, against nature.

Were the Southerners so unsophisticated as to suppose that the politicating Assembly was going to celebrate the acts of 1776, really and truly, they might say that, but for the matter of principle noted above, the Philadelphia Centenary would suit them perfectly. It is to celebrate the formation of a "Confederacy" (Fie! that smells of Bull Run! We can't help it)—*a Confederacy* of thirteen United States (not a Yankee "Nation")—"State" meaning just what it did when "the men of '76" called Great Britain and France "States." The Philadelphia fandango of 1876 is to commemorate the formation of these "Confederate States of America" by an act of "secession," performed by "State Sovereignty." And the States which seceded were all actual "slave States," except, possibly, one. And the Declaration of Independence was written by a slaveholder. And the independence, when declared, was defended by another slaveholder, in a victorious war. And these slaveholding secessionists, a few years after (in 1789), all actually seceded again from their own Confederacy, except slave trading Rhode Island, to make another Federal, *i. e.*, Confederate Union, which they fancied would suit them better; and there was not a single "coercionist" on the continent (Honest Abe wasn't there) to stop them. And to crown all, these old slaveholding secessionists grounded their whole proceedings on the axiom that "*all* just Government is founded on the consent of the governed." The coincidence is perfect. Why, but for the little matter of Church principles, the Southern Presbyterians might actually go to Philadelphia in 1876, and not only join in but claim the whole affair as their own.

But they understand very well the manner in which the *Omnibus Assembly* uses language. The Philadelphia Centenary is really intended, not to celebrate the act of the slaveholding secessionists of 1776, but the overthrow of their principles in 1865. The "declaration" to be commemorated is not the one which published it as an axiom that all just Government is founded on the consent of the governed, but that which established, at the cannon's mouth, a relentless despotism over eleven coequal, free States, against their consent, upon a chaos of blood, and woe, and fraud. The principles to be celebrated are not the free principles which begot the glorious American Confederation of Sovereign Republics, which covered the continent with prosperity and happiness in the first half of the century, but the despicable principles of usurpation, which have wrecked the handiwork of our patriot fathers, and turned their Federal Union of States into a debauched, consolidated Empire, festering with vice and popular misery, blackened in the eyes of Europe with disgrace, and, while it awaits

the hand of the usurper, crumbling meantime with moral putrescence. These are the results which that Assembly wishes to glorify at Philadelphia. This is what the flag of the stars and stripes symbolizes to their minds—which was thrown out a hundred years ago to represent the ideas of secession, free consent and State sovereignty. And the arrangement of this commemoration of national wrong, crime and despotism, was the first and sweetest task which this supreme court of this branch of Christ's Church found upon reaching Baltimore.

A few of its members protested against the profanation. Dr. Van Dyke did so on principle—Dr. Niccols on policy. The latter had been engaged for some weeks in the attempt to throw pious dust into the eyes of the Old School Synod of Missouri, so as to silence their righteous testimony against the defections and usurpations of his Church. This new plunge into party politics threatened to blow his dust aside prematurely. Hence, Dr. Niccols begged the Assembly to postpone their action for a year, as there was plenty of time, until he should have time to net his birds in Missouri. But the Assembly would not delay; they deemed the birds so silly as to walk, contrary to Solomon's declaration of bird nature, into "the net *spread in their sight.*" Dr. Niccols' remonstrance strikes us very much as though there were a reckless fellow, whose friends have been coaxing him to marry a chaste and demure virgin, in the hope of her curing his debaucheries. He is bent on instituting an adulterous connexion with another, even in the midst of the courtship, whereupon his faithful clerical adviser urges him to postpone the adultery for a year, until the matrimonial noose is safe around the bride's neck; but the rake will not wait. The Rev. Amos S. Billingsley (has not the reporter mistaken this for Billingsgate?) said:

"I go for the adoption of the report. A gentleman has said: 'We owe no allegiance except to Jesus Christ.' Mr.

Moderator, we owe allegiance to our country—first to God, and, secondly, to our country. Nail the flag just below the cross, and stand by it, and, if need be, die by it."

This is loathsomely profane; and, did we not suppose that the speaker was too ignorant to understand what he said, we must pronounce it horrible blasphemy. "The flag" which they would nail just beneath the sacred emblem of God's mercy, a Saviour's agony, and man's redemption, is the one that was lately borne aloft by a Tronchin, a McNeill, a Beast Butler and a Stanton. It is the flag under which an army was raised by Presidential proclamation *only* to support the laws, and "repossess" Federal places and properties, and under which other armies were raised, with the pledge of a solemn joint resolution of Congress that no other objects were to be sought by them, and no constitutional right of any State attacked—but those same armies were used treacherously to destroy every right of eleven States. It is the flag under which a merciful cartel for alleviating the miseries of prisoners of war was violated the moment self-interest dictated the crime, at the cost of fifty thousand lingering deaths of Confederate and Yankee soldiers. It is the flag under which Atlanta was shelled and depopulated, and Columbia burned: the flag under which the defenceless Valley of Virginia was sacked. It is the flag under which servile insurrection, arson, rape and murder were invoked against the wives and children of Southern patriots. It is the flag under which New Orleans was plundered, and its ladies deliberately dedicated to rape. It is the flag under which, in 1867-8—two years after the South had earned, even by the hard law of the conqueror, by her perfect submission, the right to be let alone in the possession of the few franchises pledged to her by her masters in the terms of the surrender—a new and unprovoked military usurpation was inflicted on eleven States, entitled to be the conqueror's equals. It is the flag

under which the State Government of Louisiana is to-day violently abolished, and the lives and properties of her citizens thrust by the bayonet into the claws of a gang of thieves and negroes. This is the *thing* which is to be nailed up next Christ's cross! We beg the right minded reader to remember, amidst his sickening horror, that the blasphemy of this collocation is not ours.

The "gentleman" who had said "we owe no allegiance except to Jesus Christ" was Dr. Van Dyke. He had defined the "*ice*" as the Assembly in its ministerial capacity. The Rev. Mr. Billingsgate, therefore, believes that a Court of Jesus Christ's Church, in its ecclesiastical attitude, does owe allegiance to the flag—to this flag. The great majority of the Assembly voted with Mr. Billingsgate against Dr. Van Dyke. Here, then, we have their position defined again, as clearly as in 1861 or 1865.

And now, gentle reader, we have presented you a picture, drawn indeed with a blunt pencil, but truthful in its rude outlines, contemplating it side by side with the pictures which have come down to us of the sober, devout, prayerful General Assemblies of other and better days. What is your impression?

"The world moves!" and it is certain that the Presbyterian Church (North), as represented by her Supreme Judicatory, moves—but whither? Is it Christward or—— otherwise?